

AN EVALUATION OF THE PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCE OF THE  
MALIAN-ITALIAN VILLAGE WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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An Evaluation of the Participatory Experience of the  
Malian-Italian Village Water Supply Project.

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This study attempts to evaluate the participatory development experience of one rural development project in Mali: the Consulting and Management Village Water Supply Project. Four evaluation criteria were used to conduct the evaluation: the criterion of bureaucratic reorientation which measures the extent to which the project's bureaucratic machinery is being reformed to encourage rural communities' participation; the criterion of social learning which measures the ability of the management of the project to learn from the communities it assists so as to understand their values and needs; the criterion of equity which measures the extent to which the costs and benefits of the project are equitably distributed among the beneficiaries; and the criteria of capacity building which measures the

ability of the project to create or reinforce local institutions capable of taking charge of the management of the village water supply system.

The study adds to the embryonic body of knowledge on the strategies of participatory rural development in Mali, a subject which is gaining more and more importance in the developing countries.

The study found that the C&M Project satisfies the first three criteria, bureaucratic reorientation, social learning, and equity but does not satisfy the fourth criterion, capacity building. It concludes that the participatory development experience of the C&M Project, however encouraging , is not satisfactory as local institutional development remains the backbone of any strategy of participatory rural development and the C&M Project has not yet developed sufficiently that capacity.

The study used data gathered from four sources: a survey instrument distributed to managers and experts of the Project, focus group sessions with villagers, participant observation, and reports published by the C&M Project.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BRO = Bureaucratic Reorientation  
C&M = Consulting and Management  
LDC = Less Developed Country  
LID = Local Institutional Development  
NDHE = National Direction of Hydraulics and Energy  
RDP = Rural Development Project  
VWMC = Village Water Management Committee  
VWSP = Village Water Supply Project

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing awareness in Mali that earlier development models have failed to address the primary needs of a large majority of the population, the rural communities. As a result, more attention is now being focused on rural development. Rural development can be defined simply as the overall process of improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the rural people.

Like many LDCs, Mali's first rural development efforts followed what is termed a centralized, service delivery approach.<sup>1</sup> This approach suggests that development projects designed by experts at the national level will, when implemented, provide rural communities with the necessary resources, services and skills to improve their standard of living. A major presumption underlying this approach is that rural people are not competent enough either to identify their needs or to make more than a token contribution towards meeting these needs.<sup>2</sup> By paraphrasing a well known Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> See Frances F. Korten, "Community Participation: A Management Perspective on Obstacles and Options," in Bureaucracy and the Poor, eds. David C. Korten and Felipe B. Alfonso (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1983), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> See John C. Ickis, "Structured Responses to New Rural Development Strategies," in Bureaucracy and the Poor, p.6.

proverb, one would say that this approach amounts to the government handing people some fish to eat on a regular basis as a condition for their survival.

Increasing skepticism over the efficacy of this approach led the Malian government to adopt a new approach that calls for more participation of the rural people in the identification and satisfaction of their needs. The ultimate objective of this participatory, people-centered approach is to make rural communities the architects of their own destiny. Here, the presumption is that the people whose lives will be directly affected by development projects know best what their needs are and how to appropriately meet them in the context of their own environment.<sup>3</sup> A major advantage of this approach is to help develop the capabilities of the rural people and to make them less dependent on the central government.<sup>4</sup> In other words, rather than being "handed out some fish to eat", people are actually taught how to fish so they can eat for the rest of their lives.

While many rural development projects are using more and more of the participatory approach, the experience of the Village Water Supply Project (VWSP) in this regard, is one of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>4</sup> See Felipe B. Alfonso, "Assisting Farmer-Controlled Development of Communal Irrigation Systems," in Bureaucracy and the Poor, p. 4

the most advanced and most promising. This study is actually an evaluation of the participatory "enterprise" undertaken by the VWSP.

## II. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Background

Mali was a colony of the "French West Africa" which became independent in 1960. It has an area of 1,240,000 square kilometers. It is landlocked and most of its territory is desert. In 1980, the population was estimated at 7,069,818 of which 17.4 percent was urban and 82.6 percent rural. With a current per capita income of around \$190, Mali is considered one of the poorest countries in the world.

Mali's rural development efforts began early after independence and were of the centralized, service delivery type. The central government, with the assistance of donor agencies, took on itself the responsibility to get the rural communities out of their state of economic and social deprivation. Numerous rural development projects were thus designed by some expert minds in the capital city and implemented according to the dictates of a blueprint. Their overall impact on their targeted population was poor. A number of factors may account for the failure. First, planning and supervising the implementation of development projects from a central location in a country twice as big as Texas and without adequate communication infrastructure is much like a gamble. Bottlenecks were legion since local

managers of the projects were not entrusted with making some vital day-to-day decisions. In addition, local people were not involved in any deliberations regarding critical matters in the course of the implementation of the project.

Second, the central government with its very limited resources could not achieve by itself its ambitious goals in rural development and at the same time face up to its other obligations. As of 1986, the national budget was estimated at some \$200 million, of which a sizeable portion was spent on workers' salaries.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the rural people who were the targets of these projects were seen more as passive beneficiaries than as partners whose efforts and inputs could substantially contribute to the success of the projects.

This grim reality prompted the government to recognize that projects using the centralized service delivery approach bear severe limitations: they cannot reach and/or benefit the whole rural population because of financial and geographical constraints; they are poorly adapted to local realities because they are designed by experts who have little or no familiarity with rural way of life; and finally they create

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<sup>5</sup> Mali's budget in 1986 was less than that of the library of Congress. See Christopher Smart, "Mali Turns to Free Market Economy," The Christian Science Monitor, 29 April 1986, p. 18.

a mentality of dependency among the rural people. As Mendoza put it:

They (the rural people) depend on handouts. They wait for someone else to keep irrigation ditches in good repair. They refuse to pay production loans. They supinely wait for the market to come to them. They learn only to fawn, to beg, to whimper.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to correct these shortcomings, the Malian government embarked on a large scale administrative reform with an emphasis on the participation of the rural people in development efforts in the early 1970s. Under the provisions of the reform, rural communities were to be intimately involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of rural development projects. The objective sought was to make the benefits of the projects sustainable and to make the rural people less dependent on a central government burdened by a multitude of obligations.

While all the rural development projects to date subscribe to the principles of participatory development, the Village Water Supply Project is among the few which have gone a long way in the process of making these principles a reality. The VWSP actually comprises more than ten subprojects operating in various parts of the country and

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<sup>6</sup> Gabino A. Mendoza, foreword to Bureaucracy and the Poor, eds. David C. Korten and Felipe B. Alfonso (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1983), p. xi.



funded by various donor agencies or foreign countries (US-AID, UNDP, UNICEF, EDF, Italy, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, etc). A governmental agency, the National Direction of Hydraulics and Energy (NDHE) coordinates the activities of these subprojects as it is responsible for implementing the government's policies in that area.

The main objective of the VWSP is to provide villages which do not have easy access to fresh water with water supply systems. The 1976 census estimated the rural population at 5,300,000 and the number of villages at 10,208. Yet in 1985, only 21 percent of the needy villages were so far provided with water supply systems.<sup>7</sup>

To ensure villagers' involvement, the project agents urge them to set up a village water management committee (VWMC) since the early stages of the project. The committee consists of seven members coopted by a group of villagers: a president who heads the committee; one treasurer and his deputy responsible for managing the committee's assets; one secretary in charge of keeping track in writings of the activities of the committee; two guardians in charge of the surveillance of the facility; and a maintenance agent in

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<sup>7</sup> See the NDHE Report "Note d'information sur l'Hydraulique Villageoise", Bamako, Aout 1983, p. 4.

charge of the routine maintenance and repair of the water system. The responsibilities of this body are diverse. It takes part in the design of the water supply system. It sees to it that the system is properly utilized and adequately maintained. It collects monthly contributions from households and fees from cattleowners and performs an orderly bookkeeping of these funds. It selects a villager to be trained as an on-the-spot maintenance agent so that only major repairs are taken care of by the project maintenance unit. It settles disputes that arise among users or cattleowners. In short, the day-to-day management of the water supply system is entirely in the hands of the villagers through their chosen representatives on the committee.

The participatory experience of the VWSP however encouraging does encounter a major obstacle. Both the villagers and the project staff are not fully prepared for such a fundamental change as to what participatory development is all about and how it ought to be attained. Asking peasants to manage their own affairs and bureaucrats to abandon their paternalistic attitude toward illiterate peasants is in itself a social revolution. The main intent of the establishment of the VWSP is to pave the way for such a change to take place. How satisfactory the results are remains a question that this study attempts to answer.

### Statement of the problem

A participatory approach to rural development is a promising, yet arduous enterprise. Projects that shift from a centralized, service delivery approach to a participatory, people centered approach face, as Subramanian put it, a kind of dilemma: "one of moving from the unsatisfactory present to an uncertain future".<sup>8</sup> So, when one undertakes to evaluate the participatory experience of the VWSP, the following key questions come to mind:

1. How profound are the changes in the structure and processes of the project and in the attitudes of its staff toward the villagers?
2. Does a learning process take place that allows the project managers to understand the values, needs, expectations and other socio-economic realities of the rural communities and to use that knowledge in designing their interventions?
3. How equally are the costs and benefits of the project distributed among the villagers? Do the poor bear much of the costs while receiving little of the benefits?

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<sup>8</sup> Ashock Subramanian, "Strategies for changing Agency-Centered Development Programs," in Beyond Bureaucracy, edited by John C. Ickis and others (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1986), p. 182.

4. To what extent does the project encourage the creation and/or reinforcement of local institutions capable of supporting the demands of the community, mobilize its resources and above all sustain the benefits of the project?

These four questions correspond to, and serve to operationalize respectively, the criteria of bureaucratic reorientation, social learning, equity and capacity building, which are used to conduct the evaluation. The literature points to these four requirements as preconditions for participatory development to effectively take place.

### III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much has been written about participation in rural development. For one thing, its centrality is largely accepted by analysts of rural development issues in the Third World.

Bryant and Whites' study rejects from the outset the argument that peasants are naturally reluctant to participate in development.<sup>9</sup> To them, there is an economic rationale behind the decision to participate in any development activity. Participation is a kind of investment that peasants will consider making only if its expected returns outweigh its total cost. For example, in deciding whether to participate in a local cooperative, a peasant will assess the benefits he can possibly gain from the venture, and compare them to the costs in time (e.g. attending meetings) and resources (contributions in cash or kind). Thus, the calculus of participation states that participation (P) is a function of the benefits (B) to be gained, the probability (Pr) of gaining them, the direct costs (DC) and opportunity costs

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<sup>9</sup> Coralie Bryant and Louise G. White, Managing Rural Development with Small Farmer Participation (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1984 ), pp. 8-13.

(OC) of the venture, the amount of risk (R) that one can reasonably take. It comes to:

$$P = (B \times Pr) - (DC + OC) R$$

This formula suggests that poor peasants are less likely to participate in rural development ventures than are wealthy peasants. Thus, some incentives must be put in place in order for rural people to fully participate in development activities and for field level administrators to facilitate this process. As for the impact of participation, Bryant and White refute the assumption that it is an unnecessary action that slows down a project by injecting needless complications. To them, participation is rather vital for the success and sustainability of any RDP.<sup>10</sup>

If anything, the weaknesses of a centralized approach make a compelling case for adopting participatory strategies. According to Frances Korten, RDPs using the first approach present four main weaknesses: their limited reach, their inability to sustain necessary local level action, their limited adaptability to local realities, and their perpetuation of dependency.<sup>11</sup> The obstacles that must be overcome before participation becomes a reality lie within

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>11</sup> Frances F. Korten, "Community Participation: A Management Perspective on Obstacles and Options," in Bureaucracy and the Poor, pp. 181-200.

the development agency, the community, and the society. An effective participation thus requires major transformations in the way an agency performs its development tasks, the way the community relates to the agency, and the way the society views the poor and their rights.

The actual process of working out the participatory strategies is explained at length in the literature. A few analyses and case studies are reviewed here.

The analysis of Korten and Uphoff centers around bureaucratic reorientation (BRO).<sup>12</sup> They point out that it is unrealistic to expect beneficiaries' participation as long as the style of program administration stifles people's initiatives and problem solving ability. For a genuine participation to take place, the structures, procedures, and approaches of RDPs and development agencies ought to be radically modified. For bureaucrats, this change would mean reconsidering their attitude of superiority toward the poor which often makes them exalt "expert knowledge" and ignore what rural people know. Besides changes in values and attitudes, BRO also involves changes in job definition, performance criteria, and career incentives, etc.

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<sup>12</sup> David C. Korten and Norman T. Uphoff, Bureaucratic Reorientation for Participatory Rural Development, NASPAA Working Paper No.1, November 1981, pp. 1-24.

In a separate study, Uphoff addresses the issue of local institutional development (LID). LID is all the more essential as it prepares local communities to exercise major responsibilities in the course of project design and implementation. The strategies for support of LID correspond usually to one of three modes: assistance, facilitation, and promotion depending on what capabilities already exist. Thus, where functioning local institutions exist, the mode for LID can be one of assistance. In situations where local institutions are present but not experienced, the LID mode can be one of facilitation. Finally, in situations where local institutions do not exist or are underdeveloped, the LID mode can be one of promotion.<sup>13</sup>

In an essay on participatory development , Gow asserts that the significance of participation rests on the following affirmations: people organize best around problems they consider important; local people's knowledge of their own environment enables them to make rational decisions; local contribution to project cost is a means of disrupting old patterns of dependency and paternalism. He then argues that an effective participatory strategy requires five important steps:

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Uphoff, Local Institutional Development: An Analytical Sourcebook with Cases (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1986), pp. 188-192.



1. the implementation of the project should follow a process approach as opposed to a blueprint
2. the project should start with relatively simple tasks that can produce quick results and tangible benefits to the community
3. the management of the project should make it a policy to have beneficiaries make a resource commitment to the project
4. the management of the project should work more or less closely with local organizations, formal or informal, strengthen them and also establish a two-way information flow with the community
5. local communities should be entrusted with exercising some control over the life of the project and not follow sheepishly the dictates of the project managers.<sup>14</sup>

Gow concludes that participation is a highly complex task that ought to be performed with enough pragmatism.

That participatory rural development is an ongoing process of trials and errors is well illustrated by the case of the Bagting Sielong Irrigators Association (BSIA) presented by Alfonso.<sup>15</sup> Considering the disappointing results

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<sup>14</sup> David Gow, Beyond the Rhetoric of Rural Participation: How can it be done?, IRD Working Paper No.9, June 1981, pp. 1-29.

<sup>15</sup> Felipe B. Alfonso, "Assisting Farmer Controlled Development of Communal Irrigation Systems", in Bureaucracy and the Poor, pp. 44-52.

of many water user associations in the maintenance of the irrigation systems and the repayment of production loans, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) of the Philippines turned to BSIA to launch a pilot project. BSIA was selected because it was created by some local farmers some years ago and it had a certain experience in community mobilization. In the first stage, NIA had some community organizers live among the villagers, organize and train them so as to reinforce their capacity of mobilization and problem solving. In a second stage, NIA had the villagers fully participate in the design and construction of the irrigation systems. Thus, they worked with the engineers to plan the layout of the system, they provided counterpart labor through work teams, they took custody of the materials delivered to the project site. In some instances, initial plans made by the engineers based on economic predictions alone were modified on villagers' demands. While some conflicts emerged, their resolution was made much easier by the new working procedures and the continuous dialogue between the project staff and the villagers.

The lessons Alfonso draws from the case are the following:

1. a greater collaboration must exist between the social and technical experts of a project
2. farmers must be accepted as full partners
3. project interventions must be based on relevant field data
4. technical design should be adapted to the realities of the environment.<sup>16</sup>

While the BSIA case analyzed earlier can be considered a success, the Tanzanian experience of people-centered agrarian development as presented by Maeda was rather a failure.<sup>17</sup> Maeda notes that ever since the adoption of the "Arusha declaration" in 1967, the Tanzanian leadership has committed itself to a new strategy of rural development. As it was implemented, ujama villages were created and administrative structures and processes were revised. The aim of the reform was to see to it that project proposals are initiated from village and district levels, and that administrators traditionally deskbound work more closely with, and become more accountable to, people. Maeda acknowledges that this ambitious experience worked poorly and he urges the Tanzanian government to learn from the errors incurred. However, he remains convinced of the long term benefits of a participatory approach which he sees as an investment in the capacity of people.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 47-49.

<sup>17</sup> Justin H. Maeda, "Creating National Structures for People Centered Agrarian Development," in Bureaucracy and the Poor, pp. 136-162

The final case study reviewed here deals with voluntary health agencies in India in a case presented by Maru <sup>18</sup>. The issue at stake was how to bring about change in their health programs which were unsatisfactory on three counts: the poor had limited access to the services, the community was not involved in the management of the programs, and the services were essentially curative and focused only on the hospital. The strategy adopted by the agencies was to "sell" their counter model of a people-managed comprehensive health care program; to have the staff take part in the definition and planning of the new missions; to experiment the plan and monitor it jointly with the staff and the community. One can notice that the strategy for change followed by the agencies is the one recommended by such experts of organization change and development as Coch and French, Jr., Blake and Mouton, Greiner, Dyer, etc. They all assert that the best way to successfully bring about change in an organization is to make its members understand the vital necessity of a change in meeting organizational goals and then stimulate their participation and interest in planning and carrying out the needed actions. When undertaking such changes, a general

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<sup>18</sup> Rushikesh Maru, "Organizing for Rural Health" in Bureaucracy and the Poor, pp. 35-43.

principle to remember is that when routine and non-routine tasks are integrated, there is a tendency for the routine task to take precedence over the non-routine.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The VWSP covers most of the Malian territory. Because of financial and time constraints, no attempt was made to conduct a comprehensive evaluative study of all the subprojects that make up the VWSP. The researcher selected one subproject managed jointly by the NDHE representing the Malian government, and the C&M firm representing the Italian government because it covers areas easily accessible . This project is referred to in this study as the C&M Project.

The C&M Village Water Supply Project started in 1985 with an initial funding from the Italian government. Its objective was to supply 250 villages in the southern center of the country (see map in Appendix C ) with water supply systems equipped with manual pumps.

Four data collection techniques were used to conduct the study.

1. A survey instrument was distributed to 30 of the project managers and extension agents. 22 responses were collected out of the 30 copies distributed. The instrument contained a combination of 14 questions and statements. The responses are converted into percentages.

2. The second type of primary data came from focus group sessions with the beneficiaries of the project, i.e. the villagers. The attempt here was to assess the extent to which the concepts and principles of participatory development were effectively applied in the real world of the villagers. These sessions were conducted in 8 villages. In each of them, the researcher met with the members of the Village Water Management Committee (VWMC). While the discussions focused on the four criteria mentioned above, the writer allowed the villagers to freely make their viewpoints. All the sessions were conducted in their language.

3. The third data collection technique used was participant observation. The writer observed the behavior of both the project staff and the villagers, their interactions, and the manner in which the water supply system was maintained. Besides the 8 villages where discussion sessions were conducted, 13 other villages were visited for observation purposes.

4. The final category of data came from secondary sources like the reports and other publications issued by the management of the project.

From the findings, the researcher attempts to ascertain whether or not the C&M Project satisfies the four

evaluation criteria defined earlier. The project is said to satisfy a criterion if:

a) the findings from the survey indicate that the performance of the project with regard to that particular criterion is satisfactory, and

b) the information gathered from the focus group sessions with villagers and from observation of the realities at hand corroborate the previous conclusion.

The overall success of the C&M participatory development experience is determined by the number of criteria, among the four, which the project is able to satisfy.



## V. FINDINGS AND SUMMARY

For the sake of clarity, the four evaluation criteria selected to conduct the study are examined successively.

### 1. Bureaucratic Reorientation

BRO was defined in this study as the gradual process involving profound changes in the structure and procedures of a development agency or project aimed at making rural communities responsible partners in their own development.

The data in Table 1 show that most of the respondents believe that the VWSP exhibits many of the traditional ills of the Malian bureaucracies. 27 percent believe that it exhibits all these ills, and 40 percent believe that it exhibits almost all of them. However, 77 percent agree that a manager or an expert of the project should meet immediately with villagers if they so request (Table 2), and 90 percent agree that villagers ought to be involved in the design of project interventions (Table 3). Furthermore, 81 percent strongly agree that rural development agents are but servants of rural communities (Table 4).

These findings suggest that the project staff in general believes in the merits of the requirements of BRO (closeness to their clientele, willingness to collaborate

with them, acceptance of a role of servant as opposed to that of master).

Interestingly enough, the information gathered from the focus group sessions indicate that the villagers have noticed some changes in the way the project staff relates to them. When they are asked to draw a parallel between the project extension agents and their counterparts from the other local administrations, the villagers bluntly refute any hint that there are some similarities between the two as to the way they act and relate to them. They see the project extension agents as people of good faith, aware of their needs, and willing to help them. On the contrary, the local administrators are viewed more as distant agents relying mostly on coercive means to enforce rules and regulations.

Also, as a result of observing the interactions between the extension agents and the villagers, the writer noticed that the former are skilled enough in approaching the local people and speaking at the level which the villagers understand. This suggests that the agents are knowledgeable of the rural communities' usages.

Although the management of the project is not free from many bureaucratic ills, we can reasonably rate its performance with regard to BRO as satisfactory. Given that

the project and the national bureaucracies evolve in the same social environment, one cannot expect the former to become overnight an oasis of "bureaucratic purity". A noticeable departure from the operation of national bureaucracies is the project's responsiveness to its beneficiaries and its approach to dealing with them.

## 2.Social Learning

Social learning implies that the management of the project devise some mechanisms which will allow them to understand the realities as well as the needs of the communities they want to help for the purpose of properly designing their interventions.

In the opinion of 68 percent of the respondents, visits and investigations in the villages are conducted often (Table 5). Nearly 60 percent believe that these visits and investigations allow the management to perfectly apprehend the realities of the target communities and their needs (Table 6). Also, 68 percent feel that whatever information or data are collected through these visits and investigations are very much used by the management of the project to design their interventions (Table 7).

From the focus group sessions, the researcher gathered that the visits and investigations provide the villagers the

opportunity to explain to the field agents the realities of their communities while expressing to them directly their concerns. The villagers also feel confident that the agents understand thoroughly their concerns.

The researcher had the opportunity to observe how such investigations are conducted in the villages. The extension agents first visit a village in order to locate it on the map and obtain from its chief a formal agreement that his village is interested in getting a water supply system. The investigations themselves are conducted during a second visit where they meet the heads of families. They use a comprehensive questionnaire to collect all the relevant information on the village (history, demography, health care, severity of the water crisis, accessibility of the village, model of organization and decision making, etc). Usually, villagers are very reluctant to release accurate information on such matters as the size of their family and of their cattle because they suspect that they will be used for taxation purposes. But the extension agents possess the skills to approach them and gain their confidence so as to obtain all the information they look for.

These findings thus suggest that the project definitely satisfies the criterion of social learning as outlined earlier.

### 3. Equity

The third criterion measures the extent to which the benefits and costs associated with the ownership and management of the water supply system are fairly distributed among the villagers.

In the opinion of most of the respondents, the benefits and costs of the project are equally shared by the villagers. 59 percent think that the benefits wealthy as well as poor households get from the water supply system are comparable (Table 9); and 72 percent think that wealthy and poor households contribute equally, either in cash or kind or labor, to the installation and maintenance of the water supply system (Table 10).

The villagers hold the same belief. They maintain that it is well understood in the community that the facility is a public good owned and managed collectively.

The researcher's observations corroborate these findings. It is the policy of the C&M project to have each village contribute 120,000 CFA ( about \$400 ) for the installation of each water supply system. This money is used among other purposes for the construction of a concrete fence around the well and the purchase of drinking-troughs for the watering of cattle. In most of the villages, the amount is

divided by the number of taxpayers in the village and each household pays its share accordingly. In a few cases, crops from the village collective farm are sold to pay part of the contribution. This method of cost-sharing seldom leaves room for an individual or a group to contribute far more than its share, thus reducing the chances that an individual or a particular group will attempt to exercise undue influence over the use of the facility. Moreover, the water system has the capacity to supply enough water to meet the needs of the whole village, so there is no point to be concerned about the prospect that some people would make more use of it than others <sup>19</sup>.

The conclusion drawn here is that the performance of the C&M Project in distributing equally the costs and benefits of the water supply system among the beneficiaries is satisfactory.

#### 4. Capacity Building

Capacity building refers to the ability of the project to create, or reinforce, local institutions capable of mobilizing the people and the resources of their community and of taking charge of the management of the water supply

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<sup>19</sup> The water needs in rural communities have been estimated by the NDHE at 40 liters per day per person.

system. The ultimate objective of capacity building is the attainment of self-reliance. Hence, this criterion is by far the most important when one undertakes to measure the success of a participatory strategy.

The data in Table 8 show that 72 percent of the respondents think that the Village Water Management Committee (VWMC) performs satisfactorily its first function which is to collaborate with the project staff in the design of the water supply system in the village. The respondents feel however that the VWMC is less able to perform its other duties. 45 percent feel that the committee shows little capacity to properly manage and maintain the facility, and 9 percent even feel that it is even incapable of performing these duties (Table 11). The respondents' opinions are equally divided on the question of whether or not the VWMC owes its existence to the support of the project (Table 12).

The information gathered from the focus group sessions and the researcher's observations substantiate these findings. The VWMCs do not hold regularly scheduled meetings. It takes a serious problem, like the breakdown of the system, to have the members of the committee meet. Even in such cases, the committee is seldom prepared to support repair costs as funds are insufficient or unavailable. Although the

agents urge the committees to keep sufficient petty cash at their disposal for maintenance and repair costs, not a single one does. Suprisingly, the monies collected are often used for other ends like paying taxes on behalf of a village. Not only are the VWMCs unable to take charge of the management of the water systems, they also show no will to exercise that responsibility in the long run. Committee members contend that the economic conditions of the rural communities make it hard, if not impossible, to bear such responsibility without some form of assistance from the management of the project or from the government.

It is clear that the C&M Project has a long way to go to attain the objective of self-reliance. It does not satisfy the criterion of capacity building.



Summary.

The C&M Village Water Supply Project was found to satisfy three criteria: bureaucratic reorientation, social learning, and equity. It failed to satisfy the last and most important criterion, capacity building. The incapacity of the VWMC to effectively take charge of the operation and maintenance of the water supply system can be attributed to two main factors: the lack of proper training of its members, and the total absence of follow-up of its activities by the extension agents.

Among the seven members of the VWMC, the maintenance agent is the only one who is trained by the C&M Project. All the villagers nominated for this position attend a three to four day training session where they are taught the basic skills to handle the ordinary maintenance and repairs of the water supply system.

As for the remaining members, the extension agents simply describe to each of them his responsibilities. Naturally, this brief description cannot compensate for their lack of preparation in the discharge of their duties. They need also to be trained. The kind of training needed here should go beyond the mere teaching of literacy and arithmetical skills and encompass skills in planning,

leadership, and problem solving. These basic skills are crucial for the development of local institutions. Since we are dealing with the rural population, the type of training most appropriate would be one which uses such techniques as role playing, group problem solving, group discussion, etc. As for the trainer, he must be more of a facilitator than a traditional teacher.

The second problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of follow-up by the extension agents aimed at monitoring the activities of the VWMC. No matter how trained and motivated the members of the committee are at the beginning of the project, the VWMC can encounter some difficulties or even fail in the course of performing its mission. Hence, the necessity to have the agents monitor their activities periodically.

Had the extension agents monitored the activities of even a few committees, they would have noticed the absence or insufficiency of a petty cash to cover the maintenance and repair costs of the water supply system. According to the estimates of the C&M Project, these costs do not exceed the amount of 40,000 CFA a year (about \$140). Actually, most villages can afford to raise that amount. The problem of the committees not being able to take charge of the management of

the facility lies in the fact that villagers do not appreciate the importance of planning. Instead of anticipating problems and looking for alternative solutions, they try to solve the problems as they arise. Another aspect that must not be overlooked is that it may be too early to expect rural communities to come out from their mentality of dependency, the roots of which are to be found in the development models followed in Mali until the 1970s.

In order for the C&M Project to maintain its assistance to the rural communities - which is crucial - without reinforcing this mentality, it should engage in what Uphoff refers to as "supportive assistance" as opposed to "enfeebling assistance". He explains the difference between the two strategies as follows:

Enfeebling assistance makes the community dependent on outside sources of support, smothering its independence and initiative, perhaps unintentionally. Supportive assistance on the other hand is characterized by stimulating local commitment and initiative through some kind of cost-sharing practices.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Norman Uphoff, Local Institutional Development: An Analytical Sourcebook with Cases, (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1986), p. 261.

The C&M Project already follows a cost-sharing approach in dealing with the communities they assist. The obligations for each party are well defined in a contract that is signed by the parties involved. Thus, the C&M Project bears the responsibility of installing the required number of water supply systems in a village, taking charge of the maintenance and repair for one year, training a villager in the techniques of maintaining and repairing the facility, and making spare parts of the water system available to villages which need to purchase them. The villagers on the other hand must put in place a VWMC, contribute 120,000 CFA (about \$400) for each water system installed, provide labor for the completion of the facility, and take charge of the maintenance and repair of the system after the first year. This approach of cost-sharing as outlined here could lead to "supportive assistance" given that the C&M Project sees to it that the villages fulfil their part of the obligations.

By properly training the members of the VWMCs and by carefully monitoring their activities, the C&M Project can certainly improve their performance. Yet, the effectiveness of a local institution depends greatly on the extent to which it is accorded legitimacy in the community. Legitimacy cannot be given from outside. It has to be built from within. In

other words, the C&M Project can only help the VWMCs acquire or maintain this quality by seeing to it that they remain accountable to the people they represent.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was aimed at evaluating the participatory experience of the C&M Village Water Supply Project. Among the four evaluation criteria, the project failed to satisfy only one, capacity building. That the project satisfies the other criteria does not mean that there is no room for improvement as participatory development is an ongoing process where constraints and setbacks can stand in the way of success.

In the area of bureaucratic reorientation, the C&M Project needs to go beyond preparing its agents to work cooperatively and respectfully with the rural people. BRO at the C&M Project should involve changes in career incentives as the work expected of field agents require not only skills, but also a great deal of commitment. It should also involve changes in the way performance is appraised so that one can take into account the complexity and uncertainty associated with the task of community mobilization. The C&M Project does not have to act as most bureaucracies which are more readily inclined to penalize what they see as a failure than to reward what appears to be a success.

In the area of social learning, it is important that the information gathered by the extension agents during their investigations in the villages be accurate. Usually, each

extension agent is assigned daily a number of villages where he has to conduct investigations. Since he is somehow under pressure to complete the assignment, the risk exists that he will put less emphasis on the quality of the information being collected. The writer has witnessed a few cases where not many people were present for the interview sessions. Another important issue is the non-participation of women in those interview sessions. Traditionally, in rural communities, women are more engaged than men in searching, carrying, and using water, so their involvement is vital for the design and then the proper care and utilization of the water supply system.

As for the requirement of distributing equally the costs and benefits of the water systems in the rural communities, the C&M Project must anticipate two difficulties. The first difficulty may arise in villages where an established local elite exists and attempts to bear most, or all, of the contribution required from villagers so as to exercise some form of control over the utilization of the facility. The second difficulty has to do with the conflicts in a community along lines of ethnicity, caste, or religion. Although some RDPs encounter these difficulties in the communities they assist, the writer did not sense their

existence in the areas visited during the study.

Finally, in the area of capacity building, the C&M Project must be aware that training the members of the VWMCs and monitoring their activities may not be enough to improve their performance. The effectiveness of a local institution depends greatly on the extent to which it is accorded legitimacy in the community. Legitimacy cannot be given from outside; it has to be built from within.

Although the findings indicate that the performance of the C&M Project in participatory development is encouraging on the whole, it is not satisfactory. There remains a gap to be filled in the area of local institutional development. LID is the backbone of any participatory development strategy. In other words, besides revising bureaucratic machineries in order to encourage rural communities' involvement, learning from these communities to better meet their needs, distributing equally the benefits and costs of the project to preserve social equity, the C&M Project must prepare these communities to exercise, through their representatives on the VWMC, the responsibilities associated with the overall management of the water supply system. This is too crucial an endeavor as the C&M Project approaches its termination date.



### Recommendations

The writer offers the following recommendations to the management of the C&M Project. In order to improve its strategy of participatory development, the C&M Project must:

- Put in place some incentives in the form of salary adjustments, promotions and recognitions for field level agents in an effort to motivate them more. These agents are in a crucial position as they serve as the link between the project and the rural communities;

- Revise its performance appraisal system by introducing new criteria which take into account the quality of the work performed by extension agents (ability to use their skills and their creativity to achieve tangible results in terms of community mobilization and empowerment) as opposed to the quantity of work (number of villages visited or amount of village contributions collected);

- Initiate discussion sessions among extension agents so they can share their experiences. The project managers should attend such sessions as they constitute an avenue for them to learn more about the communities they assist;

- Make the work assignment of the extension agents as flexible as possible so that they can use their discretion to decide when to conduct the interview sessions with the

villagers and how many such interview sessions can be handled daily;

- Involve women in the initial stages of the project design through meetings and discussion sessions;

- See to it that each household in the village pays its contribution and that the likely differences or latent conflicts in the community are resolved before the installation of the water supply system;

- Organize one week on-the-spot training session for each VWMC formed; the extension agents should be trained to handle these sessions;

- Assign to each extension agent a number of villages for which he will be responsible in terms of follow up visits; the agent must pay frequent visits to the villages he is responsible for and where problems exist, he must work collaboratively with the members of the committee and the villagers to solve them; he will submit quarterly reports on the activities of the village committees to the management of the Project;

- Offer some incentives in the form of recognition or reward on a yearly basis to the VWMC that exhibits the best performance in order to create some competition among the VWMCs

By carrying out these recommendations, the C&M Project could correct many of the weaknesses in its strategy of participatory development. It should not be inferred that these recommendations could be followed by the other village water supply projects operating in Mali as the study was limited to the C&M Project only. Further studies are needed to both evaluate the participatory strategies of those projects not covered by this study and determine what actions they should take to improve these strategies.

**APPENDIX A**  
**TABLES**

TABLE 1  
BUREAUCRATIC ILLS OF THE MALIAN ADMINISTRATION  
FOUND AT THE MANAGEMENT OF THE VWSP

It is often said that the Malian Administration is plagued by such ills as ineffectiveness, red tape, absenteeism, excess of procedures and paper work, etc. Speaking of the VWSP, one can say that it exhibits :

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| - all these ills      | - almost all these ills |
| - a few of these ills | - none of these ills    |

	All	Almost All	Few	None	Total
n	6	9	7	0	22
percent	27.2	40.9	31.8	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the responses to the survey instrument.

TABLE 2  
WHAT THE PROJECT MANAGER OR EXPERT SHOULD DO  
IF VILLAGERS EXPRESS THE NEED TO MEET HIM

If villagers express the need to meet with one manager or expert of the project, he must:

- A. arrange immediately a meeting with them
- B. set an appointment for a meeting later
- C. have one subordinate meet with them and report to him
- D. refuse categorically to meet with them.

	A	B	C	D	Total
n	17	4	1	0	22
percent	77.2	18.1	4.5	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 3  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR IDENTIFYING VILLAGERS NEEDS AND  
DEVISING STRATEGIES TO MEET THEM

The task of identifying rural communities' needs and adopting strategies to meet them must be the responsibility of

- the senior managers and experts of the project only ( M and E )
- the senior managers and experts and the literate villagers ( M and V and LV )
- the senior managers and experts and the whole rural community ( M and E and RC )
- the rural community only ( RC )

	M and E Only	M and E and LV	M and E and RC	RC only	Total
n	1	1	20	0	22
percent	4.5	4.5	90.9	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 4  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENTS AS SERVANTS  
OF THE RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural development agents understand that they are but servants of the rural people.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Total
n	18	4	0	22
percent	81.8	18.1	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 5  
VISITS AND INVESTIGATIONS  
CONDUCTED IN THE VILLAGES

How often do you think that the management of the project conducts visits and investigations in the villages?

	Very Often	Often	Rarely	Not at All	Total
n	5	15	2	0	22
percent	22.7	68.1	9.0	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 6  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE REALITIES AND NEEDS OF THE  
RURAL COMMUNITIES BY THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

To what extent do you think that these visits and investigations allow the management of the project to understand the realities and needs of the rural communities?

	Perfectly	Enough	Not Sufficiently	Not at All	Total
n	13	7	2	0	22
percent	59.0	31.8	9.0	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 7  
EXTENT TO WHICH DATA GATHERED ARE  
USED FOR PROJECT DESIGN

To what extent do you think that the information gathered are  
being used to design the projects in the villages?

	Very Much	Fairly	Less	Not at All	Total
n	15	5	2	0	22
percent	68.1	22.7	9.0	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 8  
CAPACITY OF THE VWMC TO PARTICIPATE  
IN PROJECT DESIGN

How capable do you think the VWMC is in participating in the  
design of the water supply system in the village?

	Very Capable	Capable	Incapable	Total
n	3	13	6	22
percent	13.6	59.0	27.2	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.



TABLE 9  
DISTRIBUTION OF BENEFITS AMONG  
WEALTHY AND POOR HOUSEHOLDS

In your judgement, how do the benefits the wealthy households (W.H.) get from the water system compare to the benefits the poor households (P.H.) get from it?

	W.H. Benefit More	W.H. and P.H. Benefit Equally	W.H. Benefit Less	Total
n	9	13	0	22
percent	40.9	59.0	0.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 10  
DISTRIBUTION OF COSTS AMONG  
WEALTHY AND POOR HOUSEHOLDS

In your judgement, how do the contributions (in cash or kind) of the poor households (P.H.) compare with the contributions of the wealthy households (W.H.)?

	P.H. Contribute More	P.H. and W.H. Contribute Equally	P.H. Contribute Less	Total
n	1	16	5	22
percent	4.5	72.7	22.7	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 11  
CAPACITY OF THE VWMC TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE  
OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE FACILITY

Considering the record of the VWMCs, how capable do you think they are to take charge of the operation and maintenance of the water supply systems?

	Very Capable	Capable	Less Capable	Incapable	Total
n	2	8	10	2	22
percent	9.0	36.3	45.4	9.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

TABLE 12  
THE VWMC WOULD BE PARALYZED WITHOUT SUPPORT  
FROM THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Do you agree with the contention that the VWMC would be totally paralyzed without some form of support from the management of the project?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
n	3	8	11	22
percent	13.6	36.3	50.0	100%

Source: Data compiled from the survey instrument.

**APPENDIX B**  
**COVER PAGE OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

ALI CISSE  
DLT - US-AID  
Atlanta University

Bamako, October 15, 1988

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Dear Respondent

The questionnaire I am submitting to you was designed for a study I am about to conduct on the evaluation of the participatory experience of the C&M Village Water Supply Project. The study concludes a master's program at Atlanta University under the sponsorship of US-AID.

I ask that you please mark your responses to all the questions. May I remind you that any answer is right as long as it reflects your opinion. Frank answers are of the highest importance if the conclusions of the study are to be of scientific value.

Please do not write your name or address on the form. Your responses will be kept confidential.

I thank you very much for taking your time to fill out this questionnaire.

Sincerely.

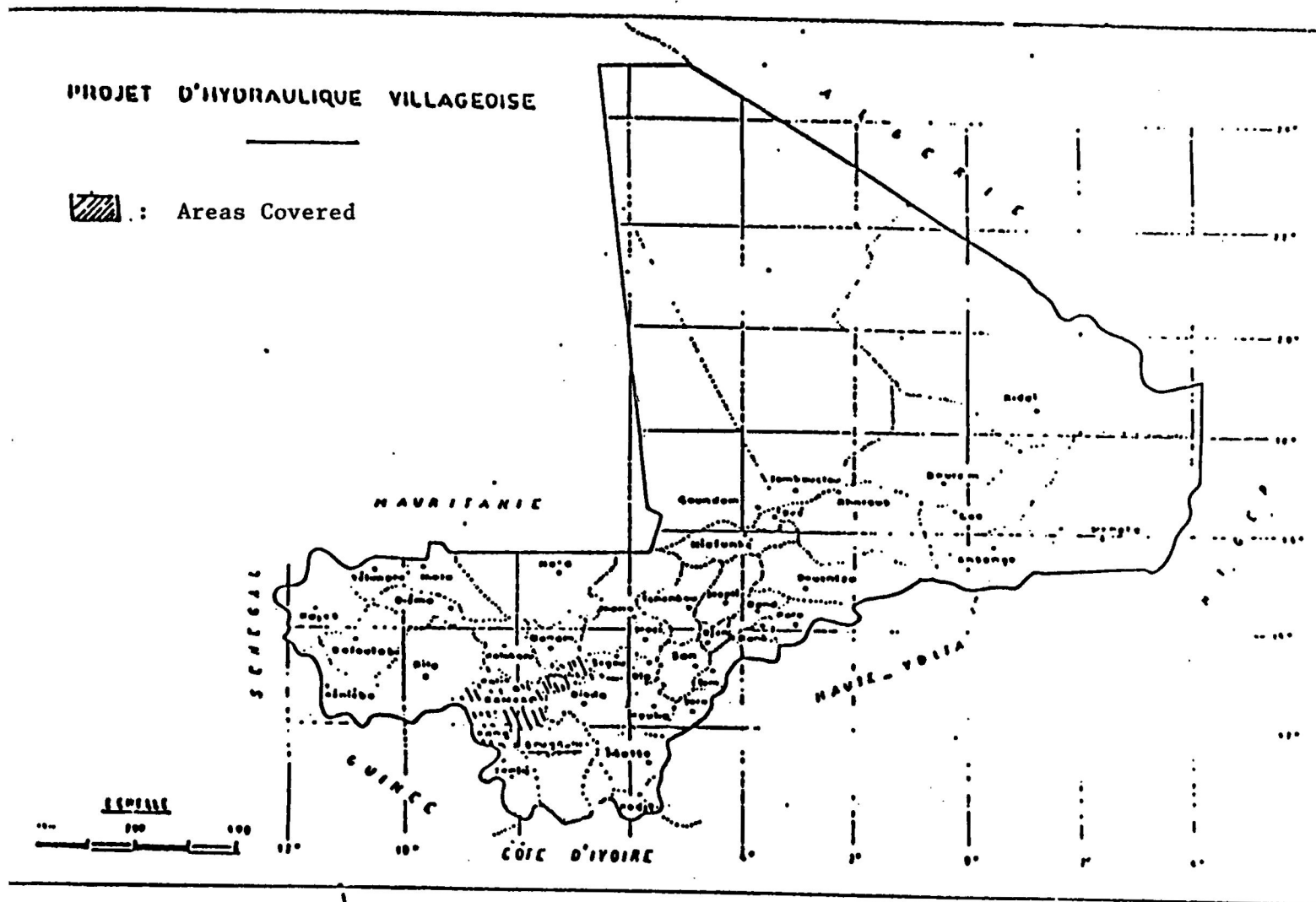
A. CISSE

## **APPENDIX C**

### **MAP OF THE AREAS COVERED**

#### **THE C&M PROJECT**

FIGURE I  
MAP OF THE AREAS COVERED BY THE C & M PROJECT.



**APPENDIX D**

**LIST OF VILLAGES VISITED**

Arrondissement of BAGUINEDA

Farako Mountougouna  
Farakole  
Mountougoula  
Sirakoro Megentana

Arrondissement of KOULIKORO CENTRAL

Menkoungo  
Siratiguila

Arrondissement of OUELESSEBOUGOU

Dionkala  
Zambougou Dionkala

Arrondissement of SANANKOROBA

Bala  
Diorila  
Golekebougou  
Kabe  
Kartabougou  
Konian  
N'Gnegoro  
Sogodara  
Sola  
Solokore  
Sounsounkoro  
Tafele  
Tourela



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